



State Senator

January 27, 2004

**VALDE GARCIA**

*Serving the 22<sup>nd</sup> District*

*Shiawassee-Livingston-southern Ingham counties*

## Coffee Break News

### **Senate protects children from lead poisoning**

The Senate unanimously approved legislation this week that helps protect children from lead poisoning, ensuring that they won't endure the mental and developmental disabilities that lead poisoning causes. While lead paint was banned in 1978, some housing units, particularly in older neighborhoods, still have lead-based paint in them.

Parts of the package require the state Department of Community Health to create a public list of rental or leased housing units that have been deemed free of lead-based paint. A certified lead-paint risk assessor would have to make that determination. Additionally, it requires laboratories that perform tests on lead levels in blood to report the findings to the Community Health Department as well as prohibit landlords from knowingly renting or leasing homes with lead paint hazards. The bill now heads to the House of Representatives for consideration.

### **Senate supports federal jobs initiative**

State senators are welcoming President George W. Bush's continued commitment to higher education after announcing his new "Jobs for the 21st Century" initiative during the State of the Union address. The plan would increase support for America's community colleges to train workers for the industries that are creating the most new jobs. The plan includes a \$250 million proposal to fund partnerships between community colleges and employers in high-demand job sectors, based on successful pilot programs launched by Bush in 2001 and 2002. In Michigan, this plan would be helpful to provide necessary training for current students and unemployed workers to get them out into the workforce to reverse Michigan's increasing unemployment rate.

In addition to funding for community colleges, the Jobs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century plan also is designed to provide extra help to middle and high school students who fall behind in reading and math, expand Advanced Placement programs in low-income schools, and invite math and science professionals from the private sector to teach part-time in high schools.

### **Theology, religious education students allowed to receive state scholarships**

Earlier this week the Senate passed a package of bills removing the prohibition against students of theology, divinity and religious education majors from receiving grants or scholarships from the state of Michigan. The seven-bill, bi-partisan sponsored package will end the practice of discrimination against certain types of academic study. Teresa Becker, of Northern Michigan, is a student who does not have equal access to the more than \$242 million awarded yearly to students in grants and scholarships because she chose to study theology. Becker filed a lawsuit against the state last year when they rescinded her scholarship based on her major of study. Federal District Judge George Caram Steeh ruled the state is prohibited from enforcing the statute preventing her from receiving scholarship money. The legislation would affect five main programs: The Michigan Legislative Award, the Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant, the Michigan Competitive Scholarship, the Part-time Independent Student Grant, and the state's Tuition Grant programs. Senate Bills 625-629, and 661 and 662 all passed with a bi-partisan vote and now go to the House of Representatives for consideration.

### **President Bush's focus on jobs complements Senate Republicans' work**

With economic growth the best in almost 20 years, the Michigan Republican JOBS plan — Job Opportunities for Business Success — helps create manufacturing jobs, spurs new businesses and provides incentives for expanding the state's economy. President George W. Bush recently has ensured national taxes won't inhibit business growth and job creation. The Senate economic initiative ensures Michigan can take advantage of the growth and add jobs. With the combination of state and federal Republicans leading the way on economic growth, Michigan will be globally competitive in attracting new jobs.

Just as Senate Republicans have pushed to help working families get health insurance, Bush proposed tax credits to help people buy insurance as well as tax-free health-savings accounts to help pay for costly medical expenses for the individual, spouse or dependent. Republicans helped small businesses provide healthcare benefits to employees by reducing an onerous tax burden by 50 percent by January 2007. The effort creates more opportunities for working families to have health-care benefits while not adding costs to employers.